Your silent words

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Your silent words

by Callybal

Summary

At a boarding school for boys in mid-20th century Scotland, the quiet young Will Graham meets a mute teenager in whom a vibrant violence seems to live. At first in silence, a unique friendship develops between two souls who seem to understand each other only.

Silent considerations of a foreign boy

It's an idea I've had in my head for a long time.
I hope that I will be able to make it happen as the story lives in my imagination.
I can't wait to write it and share it with you!
Your kudos and comments are my best gratification <3

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Chapter 1 : Silent Considerations Of A Foreign Boy

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Above his head, an unknown sky spread out thick and grey masses, as if carrying bad omens, they contained a constant ambient humidity that the wind did not really chase away when it brought with it the spray of the ocean that shattered against the sharp, threatening and deadly cliff sides. A cliff precisely held up the school that would become his residence, an ancient and sinister castle from centuries past. It wouldn't really surprise him if the main hall was lit only by old candlesticks, the smell of wax permeating every wall and wooden furniture, which would probably contain all the murmurs of the souls that had formerly inhabited it. Even as the car was not yet parked, to leave him there and probably abandoned forever, with a single worn leather suitcase as his only companion, Will Graham, a young teenager, could already sense the whole atmosphere surrounding the boarding school. He was nourished by it, every particle of air and every imagined fantasy of the composition of his sense perceptions penetrated his being, passed the barrier of his skin and eyes, ears and nose. Involuntarily.

He was endowed with an extraordinary sensitivity that deluged his brain with an uncontrollable amount of information. He was as sensitive as his father was duped when he believed that sailor newly arrived in America about some fantastic financial deal in a Scottish port. He would probably never see his father again, and Scotland, a country whose mores and customs he knew nothing about, a land completely foreign to him, was becoming a house he could not accept to call home. Although he was well aware that no place could be called home since his mother had left them.

He was an orphan who crossed the corridors leading to his room after his father had accompanied him to the employees and the goodbyes were nothing but a bogus and definitive farewell. No one accompanied him, his small suitcase held at the end of his arm, the weight of which was not so unbearable due to the small contents; a few clothes and memories too insufficient. The building that housed his room had a garden in its hollow, lined with all the greens perceptible to the human eye - he vaguely remembered that green was a colour of which the eye perceived the most nuances, for Homo Sapiens had once lived in nature. This nature, agreeable to his gaze, was a source of comfort; the garden was visible through the large windows in the corridor, so high like these ceilings that it would probably require a human pyramid to reach it and renovate the paintwork. Apparently, few had been bothered to perform this feat for a long time.

He didn't really linger to contemplate the room, probably because there was nothing to contemplate, old furniture reduced to the minimum necessary for a student, bed, wardrobe, desk. The most interesting part was behind the window, not nearly as tall and elegant as the previous ones, but perfectly placed above his bed. It was an opening onto the turbulent ocean, the skyline made fluid but allowing the gaze to expand as far as possible. Surprisingly, this distance was reassuring to the boy. While others probably favoured the comfort of proximity, he perceived in this almost infinite panorama the simple tranquillity of not being besieged by external elements and stimuli. Sky and water, raw and pure elements, falsely united by the illusion created by the limits of his own senses. He was not accustomed for his senses to find a limit, they were too acute, thus a pure comfort to open the window, kneel on the mattress and rest his head on his arms crossed on the edge, the salty micro-droplets of the marine atmosphere tickling the sensitive epidermis of his face.

He did not leave his small room until the next day. He was not eager to leave for a visit of the school, filled with boys and young men tormented by the turmoil of adolescence: hormones and smelly sweat, noises and shouts prevailing, useless and sly mockery and brutality, vacuous conversations whose subjects did not coincide at all with Will's universe. Lack of poetry, intelligence sacrificed on the altar of the desires of males with bodies often distorted by overly rapid and almost supernatural development. Confining so many teenagers in the same locked space was a looming threat; no release for their almost uncontrollable, almost harrowing impulses in the middle of the night, they had only others to unleash and forget about carnal appetites.
Unless they satisfied these desires with each other; but the taboos of the patriarchal machist society that had been dominant for centuries generally imposed silence and total discretion on those who tried, if not prohibition and self-censorship. Not to mention religion and all its efforts to abort any attempt at sex between men.

Of course, his father had chosen a religious school, probably due to the free nature of the institution. Will had no regard for God, and any representation of Christ usually produced a tingling sensation in the palms of his hands and under his feet, empathetic to the suffering endured, nervous at the imposed, displayed representation of the torture inflicted, rather than any thought of mysticism.

Until he reached his class, things went without incident. Deep down he wished to make himself perfectly inconspicuous, that everyone forget his presence as if he had just become an invisible ectoplasm, simply that everybody let him spend the months he had to live here before he could leave this place and be free. He was not interested in company, his behaviour inadequate to friendly relationships as he could observe them. No taste for conversation, too focused on the details of the faces that spoke the words rather than the vocalized content, he preferred solitude and the company of silent words trapped between the tight pages of books. Words over which he had power; he could open the book or not, let his eyes travel through the contents, and a whole universe would reach him. The others imposed their universe on him without consent, without preparation, as if burning oil suddenly sprinkled on parts of his body exposed and offered to all sacrifices. He thought again of Jesus facing his executioners.

Naturally, it was impossible not to become the centre of attention, the focal point of the universe of his future class, to endure so many heavy gazes, dozens of pairs of burning eyes directed at his only being that seemed brutally cumbersome and immense, he thought he

could feel against his curls of hair the ceiling, yet so high, he felt that his body was growing faster than teenagers usually did. He was about to break through the walls if the teacher didn't stop introducing the new student without being asked for permission. The seconds stretched into invisibility, all the clocks in the universe slowed down, he could hear the blood pounding under his temples in his skull, which might explode from pushing again and again on the shoulders of the giant he was becoming. When he was allowed to sit down, he was able to release the breath that was involuntarily trapped in the cage of his chest, his body shrinking as the air left his lungs, which had become the familiar balloons he knew.

Becoming invisible made it necessary to ignore all social attempts by others towards his own person. To let questions go unanswered, to let gazes wander without ever meeting them in return. It was not even a preconceived plan, but his natural way of reacting, or rather not reacting, making sociality impossible and speech unilateral, turning the intention of dialogue into monologue. Often the goal of being ignored was achieved; no one appreciated feeling stupid or neglected in the face of a lack of response, pride could be affected and any further attempts were usually discouraged. But not all people are the same, and some personalities more persistent than others, or with worse reactions to the form of humiliation that might accompany an unreturned speech. The damage to one's own pride sometimes led to aggressive reactions in an attempt to regain power over a situation that had been endured, thus reversing the process. Return the humiliation to the humiliator. Will did not want to humiliate anyone, why should he be responsible for the ego concerns of those he did not even want to know or approach?

Provocations, pushing, insults, anything that would make the strange mute boy react. He could return the punches, even if he hated hitting or fighting, no fear accompanied him, nor for the pain that could follow bruises or contusions. Because if he simply endured the attacks, the aggressors would acquire a taste for the blood that invaded their obscene mouths, and would inevitably try to find the flavour again as soon as they saw Will's soft face. The human is probably the most violent animal of all, in his opinion, he fights without any nourishing or territorial purpose. Brutal, bloodthirsty, capable of killing just for the feeling of power caused through the body and mind.

Being the victim was not an option, which turned an isolated situation into a circle of repeated violence, so his own hands mechanically closed into fists as hard as he could make them, his imagination creating the steel that covered them as he aimed to hit the joints or any other sensitive point that would discourage the opponent. Rarely did he win these fights, yet adversaries did not often attempt to return to beat him when they experienced the injuries inflicted by the young man in the following days.

Although sometimes the group effect worsens this type of situation. The human being, this apparently social animal, can act in a senseless and radical way, if observed or influenced by a group; and even the science of that time was already demonstrating through social psychology these strange effects.

The American boy who had just arrived at a boarding school perched on the edge of a Scottish cliff was about to get a taste of it. But he had never expected that another young man would break all his prejudices about teenagers, about men or about humanity in general.

By enamel, ivory and fire

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first few days passed without any really significant hindrance. Adjusting to the classes, to the harshness of Catholic education, to the daily rhythms required by such an institution; having breakfast in a noisy room that did indeed emanate hints of candle wax left there mainly out of religious conviction; then enjoying the relative quiet of a classroom led by professors often elderly and with little pedagogical energy; keeping the seat at the back of the class; making himself invisible by ignoring the few vocal impulses turned toward him. Sometimes some sympathy even colored these attempts, but Will did not seek to respond to them. He felt assaulted from all sides, the busy environment demanding arduous and slow processing. Perhaps after finding a relative balance in this new environment, he would be inclined to respond to some of the boys, at least the ones who seemed most human.

Although he had his opinions about the majority of adolescent males, he couldn't generalize. For proof: his own existence; he knew he wasn't the only one to diverge, that humanity was diverse and original enough to have others stand out from the majority groups, or socially established norms. Although this did not mean that he could meet similar people, but others who would perhaps be appreciable. This was not his quest, but it was a possibility.

Still, some of them did have everything Will hated, and had begun to take an interest in the new, silent, weird American. They would probably say it had nothing to do with interest, but it did. Interest in what was curious and special, in a potential target that would provide an outlet for their sadistic impulses and their need for social recognition and validation. Will often got this role by default.

Willful ignorance of the first verbal assaults was simple, but it tended to envenom the next ones, a spiral of aggressiveness. The words became ruder and the tone more obnoxious, and one night, gestures added to the quest to make the strange boy react.

Will was brushing his teeth in the common bathroom, whose weathered enamel on the sinks suggested the color of pachyderm tusks. Not that he had ever seen one with his own eyes; the association was merely an aftereffect of the abnormal abundance of his imagination. When confronted with social contexts, this problem of association could become a real impediment; his words could appear incoherent, unexpected, even shocking. The disorganization of conversations often led others to walk away.

The hardness of the enamel hit his side.
The pain was not as severe as an elephant's tusk stabbing, but the impact of the hip bones with the edge of the sink was loud, sharp. He hadn't felt the strike coming; other teenagers were brushing their teeth next to him, but when he turned around after the attack, there were only three of them watching him. Wicked smiles, with gums that should have been bloodied.

He was glad he hadn't hurt his mouth with the toothbrush. It fell into the sink.

"So, American, why do you wash your mouth if you don’t use it," growled the taller, but not the stronger one. The leader of the gang, the one that the others took as models and assisted to the point of following him in all his vicious desires. To reach him and make themselves loved by him.

Will curled his lips, because of his thoughts about what he was seeing. Not even to appear threatening himself.

"Get him," the leader ordered, and his two servants, both as dumb as each other, obeyed with a docility Will kept as a detail somewhere in his mind.

"What do you want?" he asked the main one, because it was all about his desires. The other two remained ignored, their sweaty hands clinging to Will's arms and hair as if they were possessed.

The roots of his hair burned, his neck twisted abruptly and he hissed slightly. He wanted to respond with gestures, but they were superior in number, size, and even weight. It was better to use other tactics with these.

A raised eyebrow at the edge of surprise, on the face of his attacker. "You have a tongue, actually," he replied, with a satisfaction Will knew he was feeding. A satisfied person is usually less ferocious.
Still, he approached without hesitation, the glint in his eyes incandescent only for his victim. "You remind me of the other weirdo who never opens his mouth," he sneered, and Will swore at that moment that he had indeed caught his attacker off guard because he didn't seem to know what to do with his hands once he got close.

If he didn't provoke him, he could still manage without a bruise, forgetting the one caused by the impact of the elephant ivory.
No real fear in him, nothing that showed any submission. His heart was beating as swiftly as a bird's, but the cause alone was the adrenaline that kept him acutely aware of every moment, of every facet of his assailants' psychology, and even of the glow of the moon through the small skylight or the rancid smell of the inadequately cleaned showers.

"He opens it to scream at night, it pisses us off. You too?" A mocking tone, but not only that. Will perceived a lack of assurance in it, as if he was worried about actually mentioning the stranger he was talking about and with whom he associated Will. More than a worry, a dread was nestled in the silence between the words, which he thought he was hiding with efficiency and played-out confidence.

Will wanted to know more about the story he was telling, the elements in his possession being instantly assembled in his skull to form a story that he was missing links to. But involuntarily; he didn't care about the stranger any more than he cared about his attacker than he did about anyone else here.

He opened his mouth to reply, but no sound could be produced. A thud on the door made the attacker turn with a jerk - evidence that he was stirred by some form of worry - and in a fraction of a second his body and hair were free. He did not immediately look at the face of the person who had interrupted them, relieving Will in the process. What he mostly noticed

was the combined backward movement of those who had advanced towards him, and one would swear that their retreat was even more productive than their advance.

The smell of fright and violence permeated the universe. Will held his breath, convinced that a disaster was about to happen, every cell in the air carrying that fateful announcement.

But the person at the door made a move, and the attackers were free to escape through the vacated door. Will heard precisely their shuddering sigh of relief before they ran for their lives.

He looked up at the stranger, and at first he had wanted to avoid looking at him, as with all the others, but curiosity about what had happened demanded answers. At least identify the one who was causing this shift in atmosphere, the one who was terrorising those who were terrorising.

Bones protruded under the angular face, the jaw lines almost brutal in their hardness. It betrayed teeth that clenched abnormally, behind thin but curved lips, something he had never seen before. A form of fury lurked beneath his delicate skin; it did not seem temporary. This teenager had erected steel barriers between himself and the world, he was perfectly opaque and hostile to the outside. Not the same barrier Will had built.

The difference was still incomprehensible to Will's eyes, the only thing he could detect was an instinctive fear in himself, which commanded his own limbs without the mind being able to interfere. That ordered flight, for safety.

It was uncomfortable and arduous to fight instincts, so the bullied young man quickly straightened up to run away as well. He did not want to appear as cowardly as his attackers had been. Everything told him that it was the right thing to do, and that was exactly how everyone must have felt when faced with the apparition of the teenager in the shadows of the corridors.

As he made his way back to his room, the sensation of the flames in the burning of the stranger's pupils, even as he had try to avoid direct visual exchange, spread through his limbs with imposing discomfort. His mind avoided searching for the source of this discomfort at all costs, as he suspected that the answers were close to the reasons why the stranger was screaming at night.

Chapter End Notes

As you can see, the character of Hannibal is inspired by the book and the movie "Hannibal rising".

I hope you still like it, it was short but I promise the next chapter will be longer!

Love.

Bread, butter and jam

It was at breakfast the next morning that a second encounter occurred. Young Will was eating the contents of his tray, which were exactly the same every morning, and he was reminded of the myth of Sisyphus as soon as he walked through the doors of the common room. He didn't really sit at the ends of the long wooden tables and benches that had seen so many boys sit, nor did he really sit in the middle, where it would be undeniably more difficult to ignore the world around. He positioned himself where the crowd was least dense, where he could avoid the presence of noisy neighbours in the early hours. Then his eyes avoided wandering over all the faces, so as not to risk any uncomfortable eye contact.

However, he felt a presence very close by, neither right next to him nor perfectly in front of him, but in front of him a little shifted, a diagonal connecting them. It was a thoughtful position, it avoided invading personal space, but it was not far enough away to be missed.

Will still tried to ignore it. An idea filled the back of his skull; the person had to be related to the previous day's events.

Several minutes passed, allowing him to regain a steady breath after the anxiety born of the new presence. Then fingers, which he could see immediately were elegant and slender, yet powerful, the wrist muscles already developed, pushed a slice of bread onto his own tray. The edges of the bread neat, the butter spread in a perfectly smooth and balanced layer, the dose of marmalade just right. It was a meticulously and attentively conceived offering. From someone who remained silent.

His suspicions were confirmed, he didn't need to look up to be sure. He did so out of politeness, confused by the gift. At no time did his eyes rest on those of the other, even though he wanted to know the precise colour; he saw the jaws and cheekbones so sharp, the thin yet curled mouth. The posture was soft, it had nothing to do with the threatening one of the day before. The chin relaxed, the teeth no longer clenched so tightly that they seemed to be about to shatter into a thousand enamel splinters and get embedded in the tongue and cheeks.

He did not feel invaded by the fury of the other, which had radiated a few hours ago and forced him to flee. Even so, the other currently seemed to guarantee a comfortable presence, silent in words but also in the absence of the emotional noise that usually navigated to Will's mind to force its way in.

He had no reason to refuse this fiendishly perfect bread and butter. However, he preferred not to feel indebted; and that was already too late, the stranger had already saved him once, Will hadn't even thanked him before rudely running off, and now an unjustifiable gift was being placed on the edge of his tray with delicacy.
He couldn't refuse the gift either, offered without a counterpart (or a counterpart would come); he didn't want to have to justify a refusal and explain himself with all the embarrassment that would entail. The best thing was to accept it, nod politely to thank the stranger, and then they would just leave it at that. He didn't know why he was being offered

this appetizing piece of decorated bread, and frankly he'd rather avoid racking his brain to find out, even though he was aware that the process would be impossible to avoid.

It was silly, but the taste of the offered and carefully prepared bread seemed better than all the others. It was the same bread, but its consistency seemed more pleasant (because it was cut perfectly?) the same butter but it seemed softer and fresher, and the same jam but it seemed more fruity. It didn't make sense and the thought irritated him slightly.

He finished his bowl and carefully avoided the other's gaze, which he sometimes felt on his face or neck. Although he had wanted to prevent it, he was torturing his mind in spite of himself, going through the whole list of motivations that could have pushed the stranger to act in such a way. The list contained items that were sometimes frankly crazy, the price to pay for excessive imagination. To stop the flow, an element had to be chosen, one of the most probable, and then taken for granted and true. The element had to involve no further flow of thought. He decided that the other wanted to make up for scaring him yesterday, and that he had only prevented the fight in the bathroom out of a sense of justice. This explanation avoided all emotional considerations, and made it possible to close their interactions definitively.

He stood up, keeping himself from stammering out ridiculous words, and in fact it was such a relief to be in the presence of someone who did not communicate with words. Yet he wanted to thank him for getting him out of a perilous situation, and for making his breakfast more enjoyable. He found one of the most appropriate gestures to communicate his intentions; a smile. A tenuous smile, but one that he realised was not forced, and which caused a soft sensation to spread across his cheeks and into his mind. He looked towards the other's temple, avoiding the pupils, and saw a similar relaxation in the cheeks of the mute. It wasn't a smile per se, because Will could see that smiles had deserted this face long ago, but the general softening of the cheeks, the forehead and the muscles around the eyes, suggested an intention to smile.

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Even though Will had created a stable scenario for himself about the silent stranger, with no future consequences, he found himself trapped during the day by some thoughts about the other.
He didn't try to chase these thoughts away at all costs, as was common for him, because intrigue and curiosity were not unpleasant this time. But then, it meant thinking about why he was so soft-minded when he thought about the stranger with the sharp jaws. He concluded that his presence was not invasive for three reasons: he did not speak, his mind seemed sharp, and he brought a sense of calm to the outside world.

He seemed to be different from all the other boys at the boarding school. Even his face was unlike any other, his skin smooth and pure, his elegant features radiating royalty. Nothing that could be compared to the ingratitude of the other faces in the castle. Perhaps he took great care of himself, or perhaps nature had been generous with him; in fact, it was a mixture of both, his beauty present and undeniable.
Will did not usually have great aesthetic considerations about other humans, but it was impossible to ignore the exotic charm of the boy with the bread.

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At lunchtime, sitting at one of the long tables, he expected a new piece of bread to be placed on his tray. He would not say that he wanted such an action, but he was forced to admit that he would not mind if the stranger took a seat on the diagonal, and that his mere presence could muffle the surrounding hubbub.
No one came to sit in front of him.

In the evening, he felt his presence approaching in the corner of his field of vision, simply by the walk that went straight in his direction and nowhere else.
Will hated as much as he cherished the soft fluttering under his dry ribs.

He had no particular skills in designing and crafting food, and it would take a hell of a lot of creativity to create beauty out of what constituted this dinner anyway. Since he had nothing to return the gift for the moment, when he reached for the carafe and poured himself some water, he first poured it into the stranger's empty glass. It was not sacred wine they were sharing, but water was the source of life, and the symbolism in Will's gesture was open to interpretation.

The mute stranger nodded his thanks, not just a little jerk of the chin, it was more solemn and profound, heavy with a form of respect and careful education. Will wondered again if royal blood, which he saw as blue as sapphires, ran through the powerful veins of the forearms he could regularly glance at during the meal.

He had always avoided looking into his eyes, and he was well aware that a dread impossible to chase away, embedded deep within himself in a place over which he had no control, was connected with this. The fury he had perceived in the bathroom was chilling, it was not born of the evening's event, it came from further back in time, it came from the depths of the unknown's soul. It was black and devouring, its rotten roots had to spread everywhere and perhaps contaminate everything. Maybe he was exaggerating, he probably couldn't know that much after such a short time, yet he sensed this trauma in the other; he suspected that the lack of words in the daytime, but the screams at night, were linked with each other and with his rage.

Finally, when they had both finished, he looked up at the older teenager, and they furtively shared eye contact. He was relieved to find that the darkness was almost invisible, relegated to more distant and less apparent lands, that it was not throwing itself at him like a troop of liquid shadows ready to devour him. There was even a calmness in the eyes, a kind of wisdom one would not expect to find in a man so young.

He was relieved. So even though they had finished dinner, he didn't immediately get up and leave for his room as he usually did. He lingered a little longer, looking nowhere and everywhere at the same time, and the stranger did not take his leave. They savoured each other's presence; without discussion Will felt that their exchanges, made of gestures, attention, and simple presence full of consideration, were nevertheless more constructive and fruitful than any banal discussion without real content.

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The next day was Saturday, the weather was mild, the clouds only scattered, Will had the heart to go for a walk on the cliff and contemplate the ocean, feel the wind tingle his cheeks, and his nose fill with the salty green smell of the grass mixed with the ocean spray.

He picked up a book he'd found in the library, and walked through the high-windowed corridors, glancing at the vibrant, colourful trees and leaves in the yard. A handful of teenagers occupied stone edges and a bench, and on the other side, in the background, someone seemed to be drawing in a sketchbook. The gestures that accompanied the pencil seemed like a dance, delicate and airy, and a few smooth strands of hair fell over the forehead due to the inclination of the head and neck. He was the one who never spoke, and Will found himself slowing his steps to preserve the luxury of looking at him without being seen. He did not guilt himself for so doing, for no prejudicial thought crossed his mind. On the contrary, he was contemplating a ravishing picture, and his feet had come to a standstill to catch the time and make it his own, to follow with his eyes the refined movements of the handle and the delicious curve of the neck.

After a while, the stranger raised his head, and his eyes fell directly on Will. It was as if he had felt himself being observed, or as if he had known from the start that someone was watching him. There was no animosity in his gaze, but Will was mortified to have been caught in his secret contemplation. A taste of soil spread over his tongue, and his blood warmed his cheeks with the distinct flush of shame. He turned away, unable to face the situation or find an excuse to disguise his act. He took his legs and ran down the corridor, trying not to run to humiliate himself further.

He had to get out of the school and get some fresh air to forget the burning gaze that had been focused on him. He could swear that even from this distance he had sensed a form of rapture in the other's eyes. He hadn't been annoyed, but he'd looked complicit, as if he was fully aware of the minutes Will had spent watching him. It seemed impossible, from the outside the corridor must have looked dark, his face was down and focused on his drawing; and yet.

When he passed through the large open doors of the castle, the stranger was there, his presence unflappable and tranquil, softly illuminated by a few rays of shy sunlight. Will blinked, certain that he was expected. Soil seeped into his gullet and he felt like coughing it out or he would choke.

The mute boy didn't seem to resent him at all, he walked quietly towards him, his gait so graceful that he made no sound as he walked. Will couldn't look at him, his cheeks pink and his mind clouded with shame.

In his haste to apologize, and in his agitation that prevented him from reasoning with lucidity, Will spontaneously opened his mouth. "I-" was the only sound that vibrated his vocal cords, before he remembered that the other was not endowed with the same abilities, and that it would be unfair to fight on unequal terms. He then shook his head and raised a hand to rub his forehead, gestures that revealed his discomfort.

The fingers that touched him were silky but cold, because they had drawn long in the morning breeze. Will flinched, not from the coldness, but from the simple fact of being touched. Since his mother left, physical contact had deserted his life, and occasionally his skin scratched with a need for affection. The touch was indulgent and peaceful, somewhere

towards his shoulder, and Will knew that it meant something like 'no need to be embarrassed or apologise, I'm not mad at you', and maybe even 'I liked the way you looked at me'. He didn't want to face that second statement; that was the advantage of talking without words, he could also select what he wanted to hear or not.

The fingers had left him soon enough, either because Will had flinched and the other had changed his mind, or because the original intention had always been a patient brush. Either way, Will's discomfort was eased.

But his shoulder felt hot, and he felt enchanted flows in his veins.

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